



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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CROP LOSSES TO MICE HELD IN CHECK BY WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

Mice at times may destroy as much as 50 percent of corn shocked in fields, and as much as 75 percent of alfalfa, the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service reports. Even normal annual losses are of such importance as to justify the protection and encouragement of mouse-hunters like owls, hawks, skunks and weasels.

"Farmers are apt to underestimate the damage done by mice because the casual observation of a few stalks of grain cut down or a few leaves of alfalfa nibbled are not taken as evidence of serious damage," says Dr. Joseph Linduska, assistant chief of the Branch of Wildlife Research. "Losses of poultry to owls, hawks, skunks or weasels—while considerably less in quantity—are more obvious and infuriating."

Small owls and hawks feed in large part on mice and other small rodents, skunks eat quantities of small rodents and insects, and even the much maligned weasel kills more small rodents, than anything else, declares Linduska. A farmer may save many dollars by avoiding indiscriminate shooting and trapping of small predators. Positive assistance to small owls by the placing of nesting boxes may save even more. The occasional poultry-killing skunk or weasel can be destroyed by selective trapping.

Dr. Linduska once caught 20 pounds of mice by hand in a few acres of shocked corn and demonstrated that these animals were responsible for a corn loss of 30 percent in a Michigan field. Meadow mouse populations in excess of 100 per acre are not unusual, and infestations of 500 to 1,500 have been reported. During the early part of the century a plague of mice in the Southwest was estimated to involve 8 to 12 thousand rodents per acre.

The major damage to crops in the nation is done by meadow mice, harvest mice, and pine mice. All of these nest and live in growths of weeds and grass. Their habitat can be destroyed and their numbers reduced by common farm practices which have other values to the farmer. The elimination of grass fence-rows and their replacement by hedgerows and such plants as bicolor lespedeza can reduce the mouse hazard and at the same time provide cover and food for desirable game animals.

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